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| 1 | Ratty's hunger was a twisting fist in his stomach. He went in. 'No, your tea's not ready yet so there's no use looking like that,' was Edith's greeting. The smell of frying bacon increased Ratty's hunger. 'Potatoes not boiled yet,' she added triumphantly, 'then there's the carrots to do. I don't know how you expect me to get it all up together, just the |
| 5 | single saucepan...' 'Is there a cup of tea while we're waiting?' 'Tea, Ratty Tyler? Don't you listen to a word I say? I told you last night: I said now there's rationing we've got to cut down to three cups a day. There's a war on.' She began to scrape carrots. |
| 10 | Sensing the vegetables were still far from ready, Ratty went to sit in the chilly front room to listen to ITMA on the wireless. But, distracted, he turned the sound down low, hardly listening. Instead, his eyes fell on the framed photograph of Edward - Edward Tyler, their only son, killed in action in the last war. |
| 15 | Stored in boxes in the attic were bundles of letters from Edward, written from the trenches, many of their envelopes mud-splattered. Strangely, neither mud nor ink had faded. Ratty knew most of these letters by heart. The descriptions of a soldier's life were so extraordinarily vivid that Ratty felt he had shared the experience of every sensation with his son: sometimes he used to think Edward would be a writer when the war was over. He had the talent, surely. Ratty never mentioned this to Edith: she would have scoffed at so unmanly ¹ a suggestion. She probably had no idea the letters still existed. Unsentimental woman. Ratty had found her |
| 20 | screwing up ² Edward's letters as she read them. If it hadn't been for Ratty's secret hoarding ³ , there would be no voice, no words from Edward left. Edith even threw away the official letter that came to announce Edward had been mentioned in despatches. Ratty would never forgive |
| 25 | her for that. Her lack of pride in her own son's courage was proof of her paucity ⁴ of imagination: she was unable to understand or picture the horror, the fear, the bravery of a life unknown to her. She had never been able to read a face, a heart, a soul. |
| 30 | And what a funny old war, this one, compared with the last one, thought Ratty. So much of it, to date, had been spent in suspense and anticipation since the Polish invasion. The Battle of Britain had meant a little excitement and anxiety for six weeks: the Blitz in London, for all its horrors, had little effect on the rest of the country. Raids on the south coast were rare. In rural areas what you were left with were the frustrations of wartime regulations: rationing and blackouts, shortages of farm workers and clock menders - Ratty's broken alarm clock caused him great sadness when he discovered every clock mender for twenty miles had been called |
| 35 | up. Indeed, here in Dorset you could be forgiven for thinking the war did not exist. The only thing that never faded, through every waking hour of the day, and troubled the dreams at night, was the tension, the constant anticipation of unknown possibilities. If Edward had lived, Ratty would have enjoyed discussing the two wars, the philosophical aspects of the loathsome ⁵ thrill of danger, the peculiar pulling together of people by a common cause. |
| 40 | Ah! Ratty would have enjoyed discussing that and a thousand other subjects that held no interest for his wife. If Edward had lived - wife and family nearby, maybe, grandchildren coming to their grandfather to learn the ways of the land - life might have been very different. As it was, all Ratty could do was to try to carry out his son's last wish. In a letter that Edward had not known would be his last, in which he had been full of his usual humour, optimism and hope, he |
| 45 | had ended with the binding words Take care of Mum till I come back, Dad... Which meant, when Edward was blown up a week later, take care of Edith for ever. |
| | Angela HUTH, <i>The Land Girls</i> , 1994 (abridged and adapted) |

Notes :

- 1 > unmanly # in a manner that doesn't suit a man
- 2 > to screw up paper # froisser, chiffonner
- 3 > to hoard # amasser, entasser
- 4 > paucity # lack of, shortage of
- 5 > loathsome # détestable, répugnant, écoeurant

[A] global elements :

1. list the various characters mentioned in the text and specify **whether** they are present **or** only mentioned and how they are related to one another.

> Ratty TYLER, is present, is Edith's husband and Edward's father

> Edith TYLER, is present too, is Ratty's wife and Edward's mother

> Edward TYLER, is only mentioned – he died in the previous war, i.e. WWI or the First World War, 1914-18 – was Ratty and Edith's son

2. define as precisely as possible using elements from the text the location(s) and moment(s) this story is articulated on.

> the 'now' of the text : is WWII – the Second World War, 1939-45

> probably in '40,

> since the Blitz had been on for 6 weeks over London, this scene **MUST HAVE TAKEN PLACE** around late-July-early August 1940.

> they live in England, near a coast, in Dorset, a county in South Western England; in a non strategic zone, meaning they have not been bombed and have only heard of the 'funny war' on their wireless.

3. what do these different characters have or have had in common ?

> They have been married for at least 40 years

> they had a son

> they have lived 2 wars

4. what are the main differences between one another ?

> Ratty needs old photos and faded letters to show that he misses his son.

> Edith doesn't seem hurt by the loss of her son; she doesn't need things to remember the past, which doesn't mean she is indifferent.

> Unlike Edith, Ratty has always been proud of their son

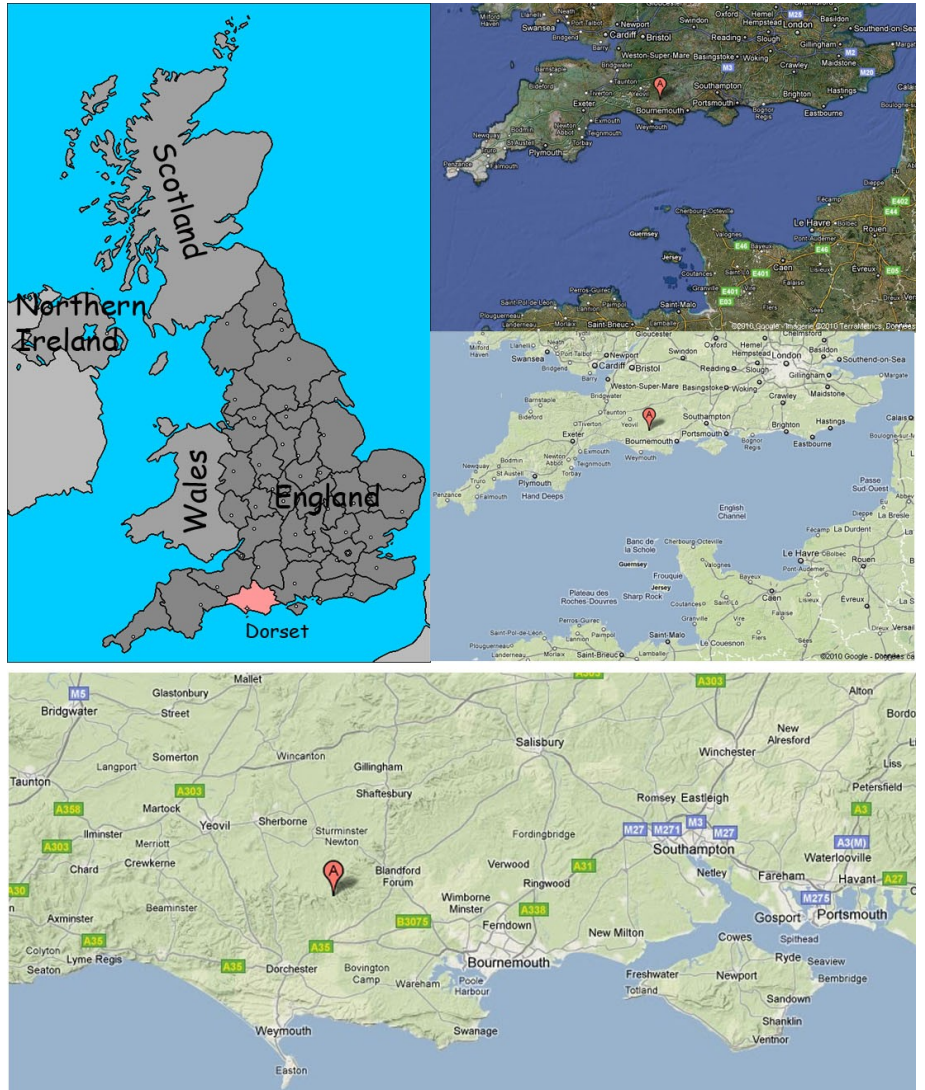
> He still misses Edward whereas Edith seems to have got rid of the memory of him, as if she had overcome his death (as if she had got over his death)

> Ratty needs his memorabilia – namely, letters and photos.

5. the word 'tea' appears twice in the very beginning of the text – l. 2 and l. 6 : does the word have the same meaning each time ? Explain.

> l. 2 : it obviously refers to a meal > culture has it that, in GB, "tea" is also the family evening dinner. Whereas ll. 6-7, it refers to the plant, the infusion.

6. find the elements in the text that show this story takes time in **unusual** times. Define those days, using the text and your personal culture.



> rations, rationing (ll. 8, 31) > war times

7. Here follows a list of qualifiers (adjectives) : (a) cross out those among them that do not qualify the passage and its tone then, (b) for each of the ones you kept, illustrate it with elements from the text.

| | | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| • Happy / unhappy | • Idle / active | • nostalgic | • Amicable / hateful |
| • (Tragic) / usual | • Funny / sad | • Plain / fantastic | • (Weird) / ordinary |

> nostalgic : Ratty seems to be nostalgia-addicted, the shadow of his dead son is his only reason to live, or so he shows off.

> (personal opinion) tragic to see two people stay together even when no feelings have survived.

> usual : a day like any in Ratty's life

> sad : the way these people live separate lives under the same roof

> plain : what their life looks !

> ordinary : well, as it seems, it looks like so many ageing couples' lives.

8. How do you understand the following words or expressions ?

- l. 1 > a twisting fist in his stomach > comme un estomac qui se noue
- l. 4 > to get it all up together > tout préparer // ici, préparer le repas
- ll. 8-9 > to scrape carrots > éplucher les carottes; gratter, épargner
- l. 11 > the wireless > sans fil
- l. 11 > distracted > dissipé, distrait
- l. 15 > faded < to fade > 1. jauni, passé 2. un fondu (enchaîné)
- l. 16 > vivid > vivace
- l. 19 > to scoff > se moquer de, rire de
- to cough # tousser
- l. 23 > in despatches # dans les avis de disparition
- l. 32 > blackouts # couvre feu (occulter toutes les ouvertures, ne rien laisser filtrer en termes de lumières)
- curfew # couvre-feu
- l. 32 > shortages # pénurie, être à court de
- l. 32 > clock menders < to mend # horlogers < réparer (to fix)
- ll. 33-34 > to be called up # être appelé (rappelé) sous les drapeaux
- l. 37 > thrill > le frisson de l'anticipation du danger
- l. 38 > peculiar # weird (bizarre, particulier)
- l. 38 > to pull things together # rassembler pour une cause
- pull yourself together ! # reprends toi, resaisis-toi !
- l. 41 > the ways of the land # les us, coutumes et traditions du coin
- l. 42 > to carry out # 1. accomplir une tâche; 2. (ici) honorer sa parole, respecter la parole donnée
- l. 44 > binding words < to bind, bound, bound # mots contraignants, qui engagent son futur
- l. 44 > till # until # jusqu'à

> > rationing / rations : ll. 8 & 32, meaning there is a war on, even if (even though) they have seen no manifestation of it so far

> The only thing that never faded, through every waking hour of the day, and troubled the dreams at night, was the tension, the **constant anticipation of unknown possibilities**

> blackout # make sure no light can filter outside

> shortages # pénurie, être à court de (to run short of)